

# THE ART OF A CORPORATION

The East India Company as Patron and  
Collector, 1600–1860

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CHAOS TO CONFIDENCE

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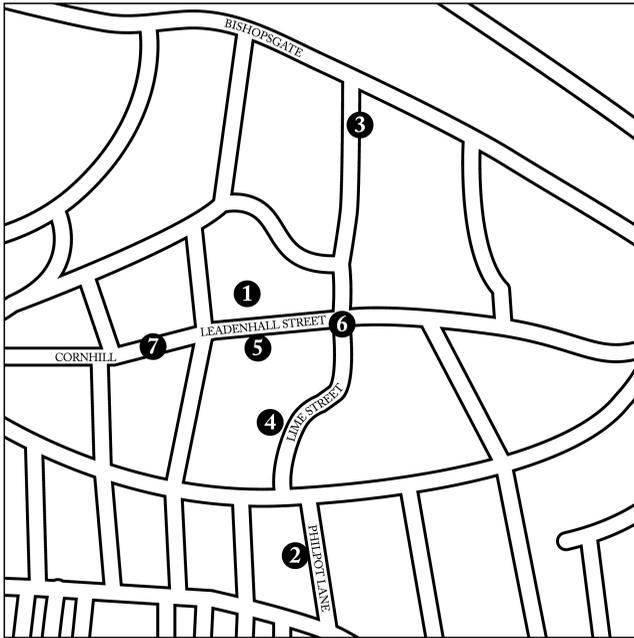
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## CHAOS TO CONFIDENCE

The artworks commissioned by the East India Company in the first half of its history are amongst its most fascinating. They document the trials and chaos that the Company somehow overcame when its key agenda in London was to make money for its shareholders through trade. Most studies of early Company-commissioned artworks focus on the items made in the 1730s to decorate the interior of East India House on Leadenhall Street. Because of this, most studies of the East India Company and art begin in the early eighteenth century, ignoring the unusual commissions of the seventeenth century.

Before construction of East India House began in the late 1720s, the Company occupied at least five different locations in the City of London, the square mile of territory inside the Roman walls of Londinium. Its first meeting was held on 31 December 1600, inside the Nag's Head, a public house on the north side of Leadenhall Street, roughly across the street from where East India House would later stand. It was attended by a group of merchants who had received a charter from Queen Elizabeth Tudor to begin trading as "The Governor and Company of Merchants of London, trading into the East-Indies". The Company's subsequent premises were all a short distance from this original meeting place. These were Sir Thomas Smyth's house on Philpot Lane (1600–1621), Crosby House on Bishopsgate (1621–1638), Sir Christopher Clitherow's house near Lime Street (1638–1648), Craven House on the south side of Leadenhall Street (1648–1725), and a temporary location on Fenchurch Street that was used in the 1720s, after Craven House was torn down (1725–1729). All these buildings were demolished, except for Crosby House, which was moved, brick by brick, to another part of London in 1910.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter is structured chronologically according to the houses where the East India Company conducted business from 1600 until 1745. These premises provide a meaningful context to view the Company's early art commissions. The chapter's cut-off date is 1745 because in the late 1740s the Company established its private army in South Asia, triggering its development from a trading company to an imperial power. As its army grew, the Company's commissioned artworks increasingly became expressions of imperial strength and territorial expansion. The items examined in this chapter reveal the Company's early misfortunes and struggles before 1745, which were largely brought on by diplomatic failures with non-Western cultures, conflicts with rival European trading companies, and political instability in England. By the early eighteenth century, its commissioned artworks exuded confidence, rationality,



*Figure 1.1.* Locations of the East India Company's different headquarters in the seventeenth century and associated structures in the City of London. 1. The Nag's Head (1600); 2. Thomas Smythe's House (1600–1621); 3. Crosby Hall (1621–1638); 4. Christopher Clitherow's House (1638–1648); 5. Craven House (1648–1725); 6. First arch of King Charles II's coronation procession (1661); 7. The Mariner's Gateway, second arch of King Charles II's coronation procession (1661). © Nick Beresford-Davies.

and respectability. Starting in a pub and ending in East India House, the locations the Company inhabited between 1600 and 1745 provide a framework for examining the artworks.

### The early East India Company in context

Before the East India Company's formation in 1600, England had access to goods from the Middle East and Asia through middlemen from Venice and Portugal who controlled the markets for spices and silk. Before Queen Elizabeth Tudor came to power, spices were delivered to London by

an annual vessel ... from Venice, well supplied with such rich goods; and by this means, such commodities might be dear, since it was in the Power of the State of Venice to raise them almost to what Prices she would.<sup>2</sup>

By 1600, London's mercantile community was large enough to support new investment opportunities. The economy was ripe for establishing a trading company that would

independently funnel luxury goods from the East to London, allowing English businessmen to directly profit from their distribution.

Voyages to the East began immediately after the Company's formation,<sup>3</sup> and by 1620 it had established factories along India's coastlines, at Surat and Machilipatnam. Further east, factories were established in Japan, Thailand, and on the "Spice Islands" of Sumatra, Java, the Moluccas, and Banda. The Company's most profitable import in its early years was pepper from the Spice Islands. Textiles were purchased in India, but instead of importing these to England, they were shipped to the Spice Islands and traded for commodities like pepper, which were far more profitable in London than Indian cloth. Persian cloth was more desirable at that time, and it wasn't until after 1620 that the Company began importing Indian textiles to London.<sup>4</sup>

The Portuguese had previously been the main importers of Persian textiles to England. An early attempt to establish direct trade with the East was made in 1562, when Queen Elizabeth sent her envoy, Anthony Jenkinson (1529–1610), to Persia to set up trade in silk fabrics and carpets between Persia and England. The mission was a failure, but it shows that in the sixteenth century there was a desire to establish direct trade for these products in England.<sup>5</sup> By the seventeenth century, domestic rivalries in Portugal and Spain had weakened the "Portuguese Estado da India", making it easier for the English and the Dutch to set up trade in Asia. In the Company's early decades, its trading posts operated alongside those of Holland's trading company, the "Vereenigde Ost-Indische Compagnie", or VOC, which was founded in 1602. Of the two nascent trading companies, the Dutch company was stronger. It has been estimated that in 1602, the year the VOC was founded, it possessed ten times the capital of England's East India Company.<sup>6</sup> In 1619 the English Company and the VOC established the Treaty of Defence, whereby the English and Dutch connected their commercial operations in the Indonesian archipelago.<sup>7</sup> However, this coexistence was more advantageous to the VOC, with the English company's lack of investment making it difficult to compete.

The East India Company's early decades were beset with problems. It struggled with the basic logistics of transporting goods from one side of the world to another and frequently lost control of its isolated trading posts in Asia. Servants of the East India Company were tasked with establishing these trading posts, known as factories, in remote areas that could take over half a year to reach by ship. Sometimes the people at these factories died, and other times they were abandoned for years at a time in unfamiliar locations. The Company's ships, known as East Indiamen, were vulnerable to the elements, piracy, and the disloyalty of their own crews. A myriad of circumstances, sometimes natural and other times man made, could destroy a trade mission that determined the fortunes of the Company's investors. Other problems concerned the Company's relationships with rival European trade companies and dangerous cultural misunderstandings with non-Western partners. This rough, unpredictable terrain perpetually imperilled the Company's existence.

In the early seventeenth century the East India Company was one of several English trading companies that were founded by royal charter. Such companies received a "letter patent" from the monarch granting trade privileges to adventurers, giving the exclusive right to hold a monopoly and perform a particular activity in a defined geographical region. The purpose of most companies was to organise trade. The oldest

English “letters patent” company was the Muscovy Company, founded in 1555, when a quest to find a sea route over the Scandinavian Peninsula to China resulted in contact with what is now Russia. Other companies established by letters patents included the Levant Company (1600), the Virginia Company (1606), the Newfoundland Company (1610), and the Somers Isles Company (1615). Later in the seventeenth century, these were joined by the Royal Africa Company (1660) and the Hudson’s Bay Company (1670). The letters patents that created trading companies were defined by their powers of “exclusivity, incorporation, and self-governance” and “varied significantly from body to body”.<sup>8</sup>

The East India Company differed from other English companies in several significant ways. Most conspicuously, it traded over a vast geographical area, taking in everywhere from the Cape of Good Hope to Japan.<sup>9</sup> Another difference was that it managed to retain a collection of artworks that are still identifiable today. If other royal charter companies in London collected artworks in the seventeenth century, these objects either no longer exist, or their provenance is no longer identifiable. The most likely reason for the continued existence of the East India Company’s seventeenth-century artworks was its continued occupation of a physical headquarters in the City of London. Unlike other royal charter companies, the East India Company maintained a location where its artworks could be housed.

### **Thomas Smythe’s house (1600–1621)**

After its initial formation at a public house called the Nag’s Head, the East India Company’s first headquarters was inside the home of its first governor, Sir Thomas Smythe, on Philpot Lane.<sup>10</sup> Little is known about Thomas Smythe’s house, but one can assume that it served a perfunctory role, probably providing a single room where the Company’s main shareholders could assemble. Other royal charter companies at that time had similar arrangements, such as the Levant Company, which held its court meetings “at the Governor’s house”.<sup>11</sup>

### **Crosby House (1621–1638)**

It wasn’t until the 1620s, after the Company moved out of Thomas Smythe’s house, that it began to acquire oil paintings. The Company’s first known artworks were commissioned for display inside Crosby House, suggesting that it was a more spacious location than Thomas Smythe’s house. Crosby House’s desirable proportions are alluded to in a request the Levant Company issued in 1623, resolving to ask the East India Company for use of Crosby House for its meetings in exchange for “the conveyance of their letters out of Persia”.<sup>12</sup> The Levant Company’s request suggests that, of the royal charter companies headquartered in the City of London in 1623, the East India Company had a superior location. Having a physical space where objects could be displayed most likely facilitated the East India Company’s early artwork commissions.

In the early 1620s, the English company’s directors in London wanted to separate their operations from the Dutch on the Spice Islands of Micronesia.<sup>13</sup> This required the East India Company to break the Treaty of Defence of 1619. Before it took any

formal action to break ties with the VOC, an incident arose on the island of Amboyna (Ambon, Indonesia). The Dutch had a trading station there, which was also used by the English, for the exportation of cloves.<sup>14</sup> In February 1623, ten Englishmen were captured by the Dutch, who claimed they were plotting to invade the VOC's factory. English accounts of the incident describe how the Dutch executed the ten Englishmen after extracting false confessions through torture. In September 1623 news reached London of these events,<sup>15</sup> and in January 1624 The East India Company demanded 70,000 florins from the VOC as compensation for the damage and distress caused at Amboyna.<sup>16</sup> The Dutch reacted to this demand by publishing "a Pamphlet in print in the Netherlands Language ... in justification of this barbarous butchery".<sup>17</sup> It was translated into English and distributed in London,<sup>18</sup> causing fury over the VOC's absence of contrition.<sup>19</sup> The East India Company retaliated by publishing a pamphlet giving its version of events, which was distributed to men of power and position in England.<sup>20</sup> The pamphlet gave gory descriptions of how the ten men were tortured by waterboarding, stretching, and burning sensitive parts of their bodies, then were placed in a dungeon where their injuries putrefied before being tortured again.<sup>21</sup> To further convey the horror of their sufferings, the pamphlet was illustrated with a woodcut print showing how the tortures were inflicted.<sup>22</sup> The East India Company seized onto the news of the Amboyna incident and publicised its gruesome telling of events to stir anti-Dutch sentiments, most likely in the hope of extracting compensation from the VOC and ending the Treaty of Defence of 1619.

The incident at Amboyna was the subject of the first painting that the East India Company commissioned. Titled "The Atrocities at Amboyna", it was intended to prompt Parliament into assisting the East India Company with its grievances against the Dutch. This graphic reminder of the VOC's treachery was the first known oil painting to be displayed inside Crosby House. Richard Greenbury (fl.1616–1651), a London-based painter and decorator of furniture, was commissioned to create the scene, which conveyed how the men at Amboyna were tortured. It so powerfully highlighted "the ingratitude and betrayal of the Dutch" that the Company had to ask Greenbury to repaint part of it.<sup>23</sup> The East India Company's pamphlet on the Amboyna incident, published and distributed in around December 1624, would have already generated curiosity over the painting.<sup>24</sup> In late February 1625, when it went on display inside Crosby Hall,<sup>25</sup> its prominent position ensured that all those who entered the Company's headquarters were confronted by this odious moment of horror and suffering. One woman, purportedly a widow of one of the massacred men, fainted when she saw it.<sup>26</sup> The painting's graphic subject generated so much interest that crowds flocked to see it at Richard Greenbury's studio before it was even completed. According to William Foster, it created such outrage that London's Dutch residents had to appeal to King Charles I's Privy Council for protection.<sup>27</sup>

Only two weeks after the painting went on display inside Crosby House, the Crown intervened when "Lord Duke [of Buckingham] sent for the picture" of "the torment at Amboyna" and took it away.<sup>28</sup> George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham, was a favourite in the court of King Charles I, and an important art collector in the 1620s who informed personal tastes at court.<sup>29</sup> Immediately after the Amboyna painting's removal, it went missing, and was presumably destroyed. One suspects that the Company's directors were taken by surprise by the Privy Council's prompt decision to

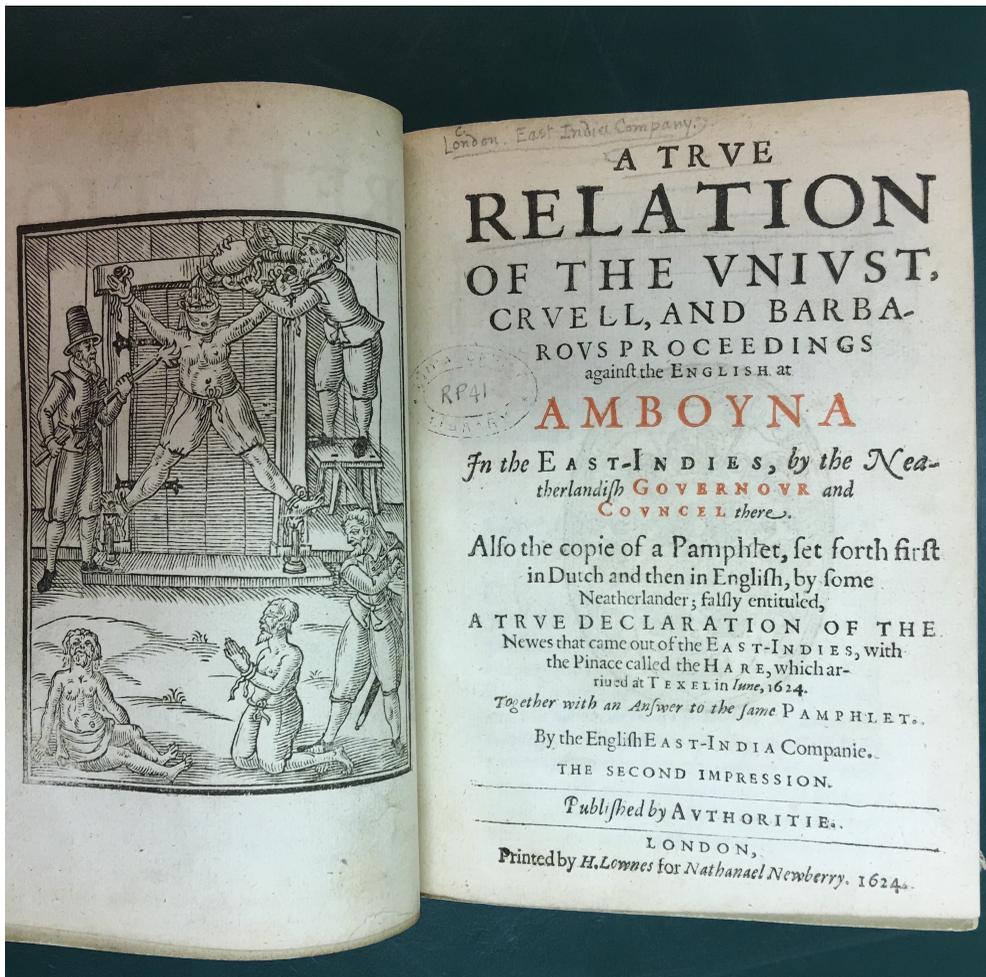


Figure 1.2. Frontispiece and title page of the East India Company's pamphlet describing the Amboyna Massacre, 1624. British Library, T39923. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.

seize the picture. In April 1625 Richard Greenbury still hadn't been paid for the painting and appeared before the Court of Directors to demand a hundred pounds for his vanished efforts.<sup>30</sup> It was an optimistic price tag, even for such a large painting, which Greenbury had to lower. By comparison, a large portrait of King Charles I's five eldest children by Antony Van Dyck fetched exactly the same price in 1637. Eventually the Company agreed to pay Greenbury 40 pounds.<sup>31</sup>

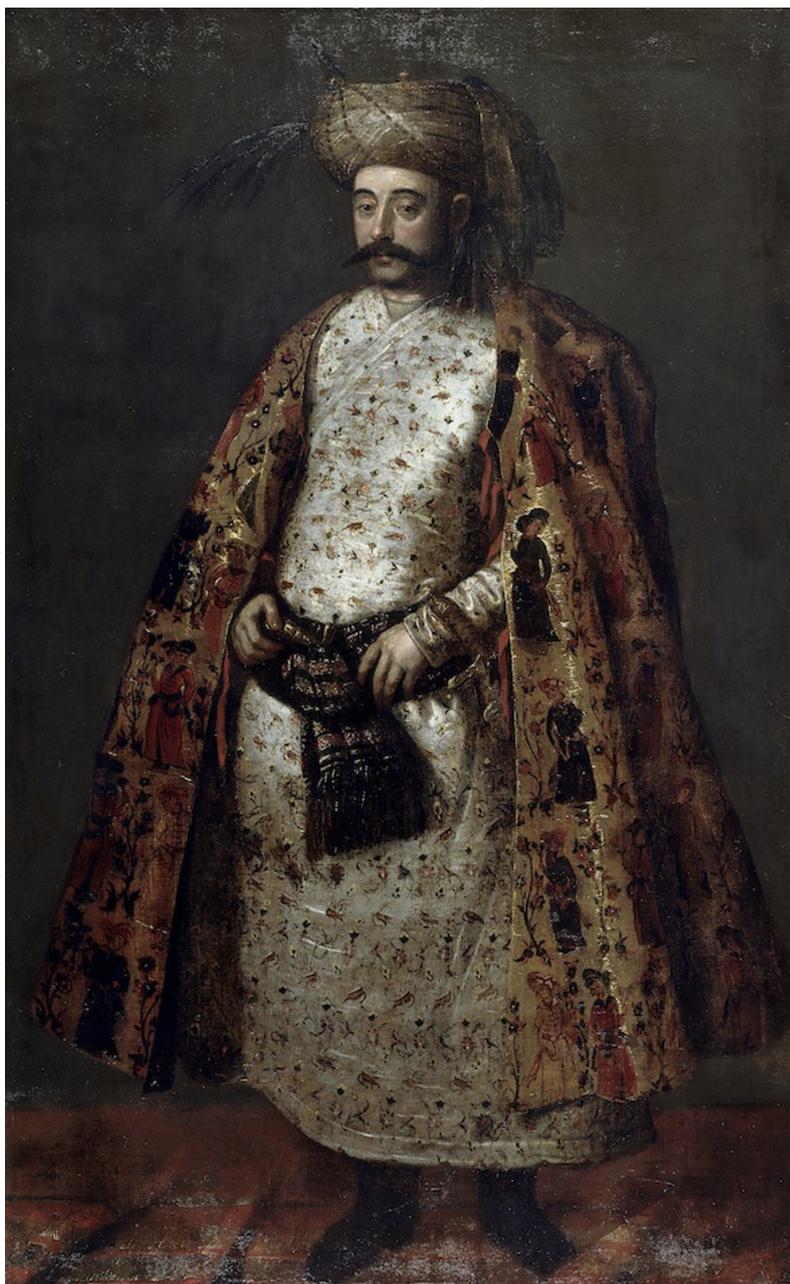
The first artwork to be commissioned by the East India Company promoted an interpretation of the Amboyna incident that helped its directors in London achieve their aims. It was most likely based on images that the Company supplied to Greenbury,

making the woodcut illustrations inside the Company's pamphlet of 1624 the main visual record of how this peculiar painting might have looked. Both the pamphlet and the Greenbury painting promoted the East India Company's version of the incident, serving a business agenda to extract money from the Dutch and upend the Treaty of Defence of 1619. However, while the Company was fomenting anti-Dutch indignation in England, its employees in its Asian factories were getting on with business in proximity to the Dutch.

The Amboyna commission was a fiasco, with the King's Privy Council making it disappear. Perhaps this failure was what compelled the Company to commission another painting by the same artist less than 12 months later.<sup>32</sup> In 1626, Richard Greenbury began work on a pair of full-length portraits of Naqd Ali Beg, the trade envoy of Shah Abbas of Persia, who arrived in London in early February 1626.<sup>33</sup> One of the two portraits, measuring seven feet tall, has survived, and is now in the British Library's collections.<sup>34</sup> It shows a young man dressed in several layers of exceptionally high-quality, elaborately woven Persian silk garments. His iridescent gown contrasts with his brightly coloured sash and turban, and his heavy silk robe is woven with human figures. His attire effectively functions as a catalogue of the luxury goods that the Shah of Persia was offering to trade with the East India Company, through the sanction of King Charles I. Unfortunately, Naqd Ali Beg was not the sole envoy of Shah Abbas in London at that time, and his encounter with this rival ambassador resulted in a moment of disgrace that destroyed his reputation.

Shah Abbas of Persia was well known for his energetic approach to foreign diplomacy, which involved sending trade ambassadors to different European capitals.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, he sometimes sent out too many ambassadors at once, with disastrous consequences. This appears to be what happened in London in the mid-1620s, when Naqd Ali Beg was in London. Two years earlier, another trade envoy of Shah Abbas, the English adventurer Sir Robert Shirley, had arrived in London. The East India Company knew of Robert Shirley's arrival in 1624, but disputed his authority, claiming that there was "almost no possibility that Sr Robt Shirley should have any authentique power out of Persia to negotiate as an Ambassador",<sup>36</sup> and regarding his presence in London as an affront. Curiously, in the Company's minutes from 1625, when Shirley's name comes up, it appears alongside the Company's discussions of the Amboyna incident, suggesting that it viewed Shirley as equally threatening and problematic.<sup>37</sup>

When Naqd Ali Beg arrived in London in 1626 bearing letters from Shah Abbas of Persia, the East India Company threw its support behind this exotic newcomer, probably in the hope of supplanting Sir Robert Shirley's position at the court of King Charles I. Unfortunately, his first meeting with Robert Shirley was in the presence of the king, and it went extremely badly. Not only did Naqd Ali Beg declare Robert Shirley to be an imposter, he also, allegedly, struck him across the face. The behaviour of the two rival Persian ambassadors disgusted Charles I. He slighted Naqd Ali Beg, declaring that he and Shirley must return to Shah Abbas' court to sort out their differences.<sup>38</sup> This was not the only incident that had blighted Naqd Ali Beg's embassy to London. Other questions had arisen about his character, most likely from basic cultural and linguistic misunderstandings. He was considered coarse and quarrelsome, and his reputation was further damaged by a rumour that in London he was co-habiting with a "lewde strumpet".<sup>39</sup>



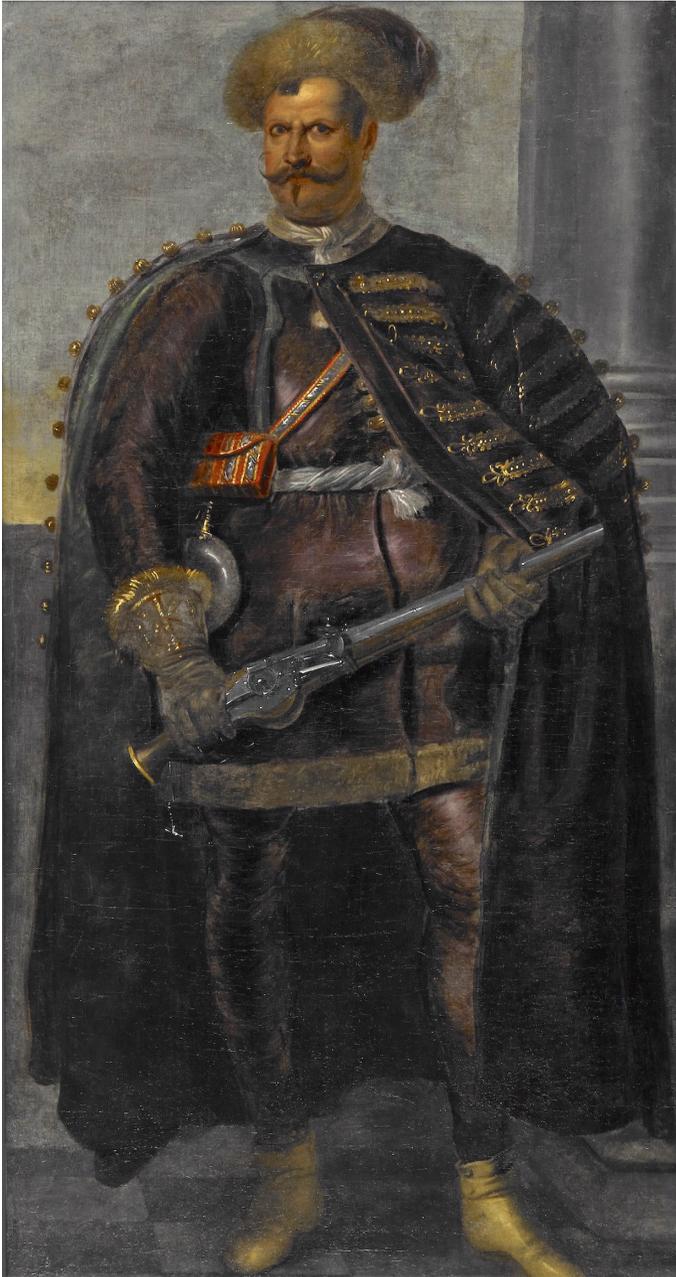
*Figure 1.3.* Portrait of Naqd Ali Beg by Richard Greenbury, 1626. British Library, Foster 23.  
Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.

The East India Company chose to make light of his expulsion from the court of Charles I. As he prepared to return to Persia and face his destiny before Shah Abbas, the Company treated him with all the pomp and respect of a successful trade ambassador, presenting him with extravagant parting gifts such as “a Bason and Ewre of Silver with two Flaggon Potts to the valew of £50, and also his owne Picture, which is exactly and curiously drawne by Mr. Greenburie”.<sup>40</sup> The gifting of the silver ewer and basin, along with one of the two portraits by Richard Greenbury, must have been meaningless for Naqd Ali Beg, who now lived in terror of his reception at Shah Abbas’ court in Persia. By the time his ship reached the west coast of India, he had committed suicide after ingesting nothing but opium for four consecutive days.<sup>41</sup> Through death, he avoided the appalling punishment that most likely awaited him. According to Thomas Herbert, an Englishman who travelled on the same ship in 1627, when Shah Abbas learned of Naqd Ali Beg’s suicide he said, “it was well he poisoned himself, for had he come to court, his bodie should have been cut into three hundred sixty five pieces, and burnt in the open Mydan, or market place with Dogge turds”.<sup>42</sup> The East India Company’s copy of Naqd Ali Beg’s portrait was displayed inside Crosby House as a memento of an exotic foreign trade ambassador’s time in London, when, in fact, it was a ghostly reminder of the sloppy diplomacy that destroyed a man’s life. Naqd Ali Beg’s story was eventually forgotten, and by 1803, a written description of the very same painting described the sitter as “another nabob”.<sup>43</sup> As for the duplicate portrait the Company gave to Naqd Ali Beg in 1627, it most likely ended up, along with his corpse, at the bottom of the Arabian Sea.

The Greenbury paintings commissioned by the East India Company in the 1620s highlight its chaotic beginnings and manipulative nature. Establishing trade in other parts of the world and working alongside one’s competitors in faraway places was fraught with difficulties. From Crosby House in London, the Company scripted versions of events that scapegoated its misfortunes and overlooked its foibles. The Amboyna painting, the East India Company’s first documented commission, illustrated an event that was used to blackmail the Dutch. As for the portrait of Naqd Ali Beg, the East India Company had put this unfortunate man at the centre of a diplomatic incident that was so damning, his only escape was suicide.

The next painting to be acquired by the East India Company was a full-length portrait of a man from Poland. There is no information about the painting in the Company’s records, so the circumstances behind its acquisition are unknown. Based on the man’s costume, hairstyle, and pistol, it most likely dates to the 1620s or 1630s,<sup>44</sup> when the European trade in Persian textiles was linked with Poland. Although the East India Company was a maritime trading company in the seventeenth century, there was interest in overland trade with Persia and Turkey, which followed a route through central Europe. As the demand for Persian textiles and carpets increased in Western Europe, increasingly large quantities of goods passed along this overland trade route, which crossed Poland. The popularity of Persian and Turkish goods made them desirable amongst Poland’s nobility,<sup>45</sup> leading to the production of imitation Persian goods in Poland.<sup>46</sup>

The East India Company was interested in procuring these goods and wrote in its Court Minutes in January 1619 that it “should consider procuring a kind of calico worn in Poland by the ladies about their necks like towels”.<sup>47</sup> In 1630, when discussing



*Figure 1.4.* Portrait of a Polish man, c.1630. British Library, Foster 15. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.

sales of cloth at Crosby House, the Company noted that some “will find vent for Turkey or Poland”.<sup>48</sup> Added to this, Polish trade ambassadors had travelled to London in 1621 and 1633. Perhaps ambassadorial contacts with Poland facilitated the painting’s acquisition for Crosby House.<sup>49</sup> The man is unmistakably Polish, with his hair cut short and a distinctive peak at the hairline’s centre. The powder horn and wheel-lock pistol hanging from his belt confirm the painting’s date, matching the weaponry used in Poland in the 1620s.<sup>50</sup> His costume, with its cloak, footwear, twisted sash-belt, and tunic, matches those worn by Polish soldiers in the early seventeenth century.<sup>51</sup> It is evidence of the connection between the East India Company and Poland at that time. Just like the portrait of Naqd Ali Beg, the garments he wears might have shown the kinds of cloth that the Company sought to import. The fashion in Poland for Persian textiles meant that Polish noblemen and dignitaries wore similar garments,<sup>52</sup> which during the seventeenth century became early symbols of Polish national awareness, reflecting an emerging nationalist ideology.<sup>53</sup> The date of the painting certainly corresponds with the moment when the East India Company contemplated trade with Poland.

### Sir Christopher Clitherow’s House (1638–1648)

In 1638 the East India Company’s tenancy at Crosby House expired, and its landlord, the Earl of Northampton, demanded new “terms that were judged to be exorbitant”.<sup>54</sup> A new house was required, and Sir Christopher Clitherow (1578–1641), a prominent member of the East India Company who had served as the Mayor of London, offered tenancy in his house. While based at Sir Christopher Clitherow’s house, no new artworks were acquired, possibly because of a lack of space. In September 1642, shortly after Clitherow’s death, the Court of Directors recorded that on account of “the small accommodation they have for want of warehouse rooms [they] did thinke fit that a more convenient house shalbe looked out”.<sup>55</sup> The Company enquired about moving back into Crosby House in 1644,<sup>56</sup> and when this request failed, the search expanded for an alternative headquarters. In 1647 the Company arranged to move into Craven House.

During the Company’s occupation of Sir Christopher Clitherow’s house, the English Civil War broke out, causing financial instability in the City of London. Ships that might have been dispatched on trade missions to Asia were requisitioned for the war effort and demand for luxury goods declined. Expensive cloth became unfashionable because of puritanical aesthetics and trade focused on the distribution of essential commodities. The Company’s operations shrank, making it difficult to finance voyages to Asia. Company servants stationed at settlements in Asia were deserted, sometimes for decades at a time. Some factories were abandoned, while others, with no incentive to please their corporate masters in London, made their own private connections with Asian trade networks. A few servants independently established themselves “with boundless opportunities”,<sup>57</sup> such as Richard Hudson, a servant at Machilipatnam, who wrote in 1639 that without the Company’s assistance, he was empowered to do whatever he pleased.<sup>58</sup> Corporate neglect disintegrated the Company’s authority over its Asian factories, creating problems that were just as profound as the political and financial instability that prevailed in London.

### Craven House (1648–1725)

In 1647 the Company began preparing for the move to Craven House and was installed there by the summer of 1648.<sup>59</sup> A few months after their relocation, King Charles I was executed. The East India Company's existence was already imperilled by its inability to control its overseas operations. It now required the full support of Parliamentarians because of a more pressing threat. The Company's royal charter was due for renewal in 1654. With no precedent for renewing a royal charter without the authority of a monarch, the Company appealed to Oliver Cromwell to acknowledge its existence. Without the Lord Protector's approval, it would cease to exist.

In 1653, Oliver Cromwell decided not to renew the East India Company's charter, and it looked like it would disappear. Then in 1654 the first Anglo-Dutch War ended, with England victorious under Cromwell's command. In the Treaty of Westminster, which was signed in April 1654, the Dutch were instructed to pay the East India Company for its losses in the Spice Islands and to compensate the families of the men who died in the Amboyna Massacre. Through the treaty, the East India Company gained a place within Cromwell's statecraft, allowing it to limp along as a corporate entity in the City of London until the beginning of 1657. It still didn't have the substitute charter it required, so the Company gave the Lord Protector an ultimatum. At the end of one month, if no decision was made about the charter's renewal, the Company would abandon all its trade ventures in the East. Faced with this deadline, Cromwell finally issued a charter to the East India Company.

There is only one object connected with the East India Company from the Civil War period. It is a copy of an architectural fragment from the early 1650s. This large, round ceiling boss, bearing the East India Company's first coat of arms, is a plaster cast of an ornament that was set into the ceiling of Poplar Chapel, the East India Company's church in London's docklands, near the Company's almshouse.<sup>60</sup> The almshouse is no longer standing, but the chapel, which was renamed St. Matthias Church, is still in the London neighbourhood of Poplar.<sup>61</sup> Construction of the chapel began in 1652, and it was completed in 1654, the year that the East India Company's charter was due for renewal. It was built on East India Company land and paid for by private subscription.<sup>62</sup> The exterior of the chapel was changed in the nineteenth century, but its interior is believed to be the same as in the mid-seventeenth century. It is one of only three surviving churches in England that were constructed during the English Civil War.

In 1658, one year after the Company's treaty was renewed, Oliver Cromwell died. By 1660, King Charles I's exiled son had returned to London to be crowned King Charles II. The restoration of the monarchy brought a flurry of prosperity and demand for luxury foreign goods returned. However, the East India Company found itself, once again, in a state of crisis. Having renewed its expired charter in 1657 under Oliver Cromwell, the Company's existence now hinged upon reversing its political position and becoming a fervent supporter of the monarchy. Instead of commissioning oil paintings for display behind closed doors, as in the early seventeenth century, the Company's loyalty to the King was celebrated on the streets of London. Along with other mercantile establishments, the East India Company took part in the coronation celebrations of King Charles II. Two decorative structures were erected in 1661,



*Figure 1.5.* Plaster cast of the East India Company's coat of arms c.1654 from the ceiling of St Matthias Church, Poplar, London. British Library, Foster 859. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.

ensuring that anyone who walked down Leadenhall Street knew about the East India Company's mercantile prosperity, adventurousness, and loyalty to the King. It distanced itself from the Parliamentary cause and publicly threw its support behind the monarchy. As for the charter that Cromwell issued the Company in 1657, it went missing and was most likely destroyed.

The first of these two structures was a triumphal gateway that King Charles II's coronation procession passed through on 22 April 1661. Known as the "Mariners Gate", it was located on Cornhill, and was approached immediately after the king's procession moved past Craven House on Leadenhall Street. It was one of four temporary

gateways sponsored by businesses and individuals seeking the King's favour along the procession's route.<sup>63</sup> The Mariners Gate expressed the continuity of England's monarchy, and the East India Company's support for Charles II. The Company's coat of arms, as it appeared on the ceiling boss of the East India Company's chapel at Poplar, was in the top-centre of the gate. Directly below the coat of arms was a square panel showing Charles II as a child, standing beside his father, Charles I, while gazing upon the 'Sovereign of the Seas', the largest and most famous battleship to be constructed in England in the seventeenth century.<sup>64</sup> To the left and right of this square composition were personified figures of Asia, Africa, America, and Europe, holding flags bearing the insignias of various trading companies. Other figures on the gateway showed views of famous cities and personified rivers. At the very top was a figure of Atlas holding a globe on his shoulders, with a tall ship balanced above it. When Charles II's coronation procession moved through this gateway on 22 April 1661, three sailors sang a shanty from a specially constructed stage next to the arch. Besides extolling their loyalty to the monarchy, the singers proclaimed themselves as,

"All Merry Boys, and Loyal,  
 "Our Pockets full of Pay,  
 "This Triumphal Day".<sup>65</sup>

Their happy song, declaring their prosperity under Charles II's rule, was accompanied by six musicians "who made a Winde-Musick", and others who played drums and trumpets,<sup>66</sup> making this massive temporary structure into a public performance.

The second decorative project the Company commissioned in 1661 was the exterior of Craven House, which Charles II's coronation procession passed before reaching the Mariners Gate. Above Craven House's top windows, a large panel made of wood and plaster was erected that was painted with ships. The panel was flanked on either side by dolphins and topped with a statue of a mariner, with the Company's coat of arms set below it. The Craven House superstructure was completed in advance of the coronation ceremonies and was described on 17 April 1661, five days before the coronation, by Samuel Pepys who wrote that he "saw the pictures of the ships and other things this morning, set up before the East Indy House, which are well done". Craven House's newly decorated façade, with its unique maritime imagery, linked the Company's headquarters with the Mariners Gate. The superstructure also physically increased Craven House's size, making it appear an entire story taller.<sup>67</sup>

The Maritime Gate and the decorated façade of Craven House worked together "to represent the Companies loyall gratitude to His Majesty",<sup>68</sup> allowing the East India Company to explicitly connect itself with the monarchy. This enthusiasm for Charles II's accession to the throne was matched by the Company's eagerness to grant loans to the new monarch. Between 1660 and 1684, the Company lent him a total of £324,150,<sup>69</sup> and was rewarded by having its powers extended. Through the dowry of Catherine de Braganza, Charles II was granted ownership of Bombay from the Portuguese, and in 1668 he handed it over to the East India Company for a rent of ten pounds a year. In 1677 he then allowed the Company to issue its own coinage at Bombay. Through these changes, Bombay replaced Surat as the Company's main factory on India's west coast. In 1688 the Company was granted the right to occupy St



Figure 1.6. The Mariners Gate on Cornhill where King Charles II's coronation procession passed on 22 April 1661. British Library, 604.i.18. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.

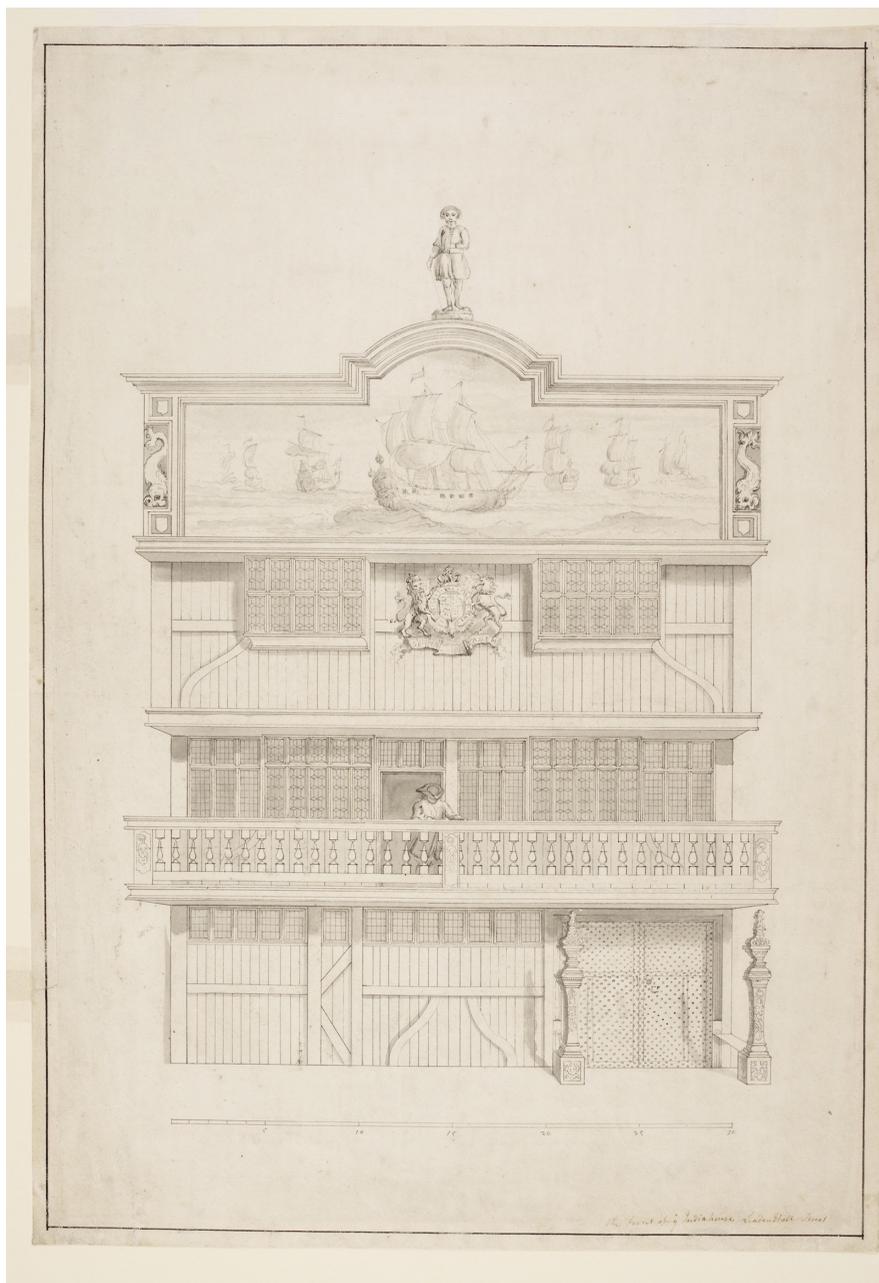


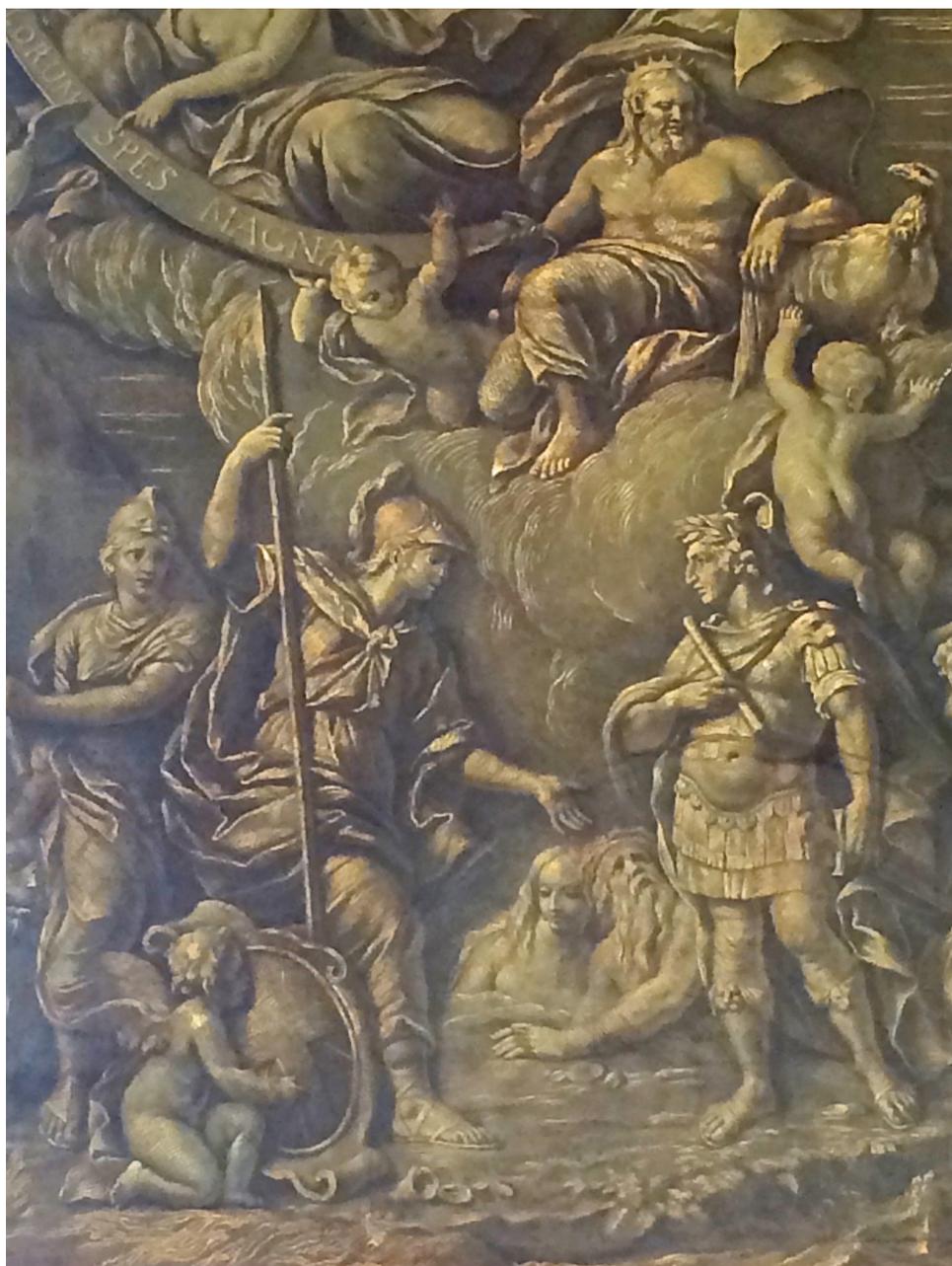
Figure 1.7. Façade of Craven House by George Vertue, c.1711. British Library, WD1341. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.

Helena, a rocky island that became a key stopping point for ships travelling across the Atlantic.<sup>70</sup>

In the early eighteenth century, two events significantly changed the East India Company. The first of these was the formation of the United East India Company. Although the Company had fervently aligned itself with the monarchy in the 1660s, recasting itself as loyal to Charles II, circumstances changed under William III. The monarchy and Parliament took issue with the Company's charter because of the limited control it held over its operations in Asia. Its remaining factories had survived not because of the Company's support, but because the factors who ran them had overcome their abandonment in the seventeenth century. Having failed to fulfil its purpose as an English trading company, in 1697, when the Company's charter was again up for renewal, William III decided to invest in a newly created East India Company called "The Governor and Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies". Parliament ordered the "old" East India Company to close its affairs in Asia and dissolve itself.<sup>71</sup> However, the new company that was supported by William III had no networks within the economic and political structures of Asia. Only three years after its launch, the new company's shareholders and Parliament, desperate to improve their chances of success in Asia, decided to merge with the old company before it disappeared. In January 1702 the old and new companies were joined, and by 1709 the "United East India Company" was fully operational.<sup>72</sup>

The other event that changed the Company in the early eighteenth century was the concomitant Act of Union between England and Scotland in 1706–1707. Forged under the rule of William III, the most powerful assemblage of artworks to declare the importance of this event is James Thornhill's Painted Hall, next to the Royal Naval College at Greenwich. Thornhill began painting the hall's 4,000-square-metre interior in 1708, and finished it nearly 20 years later, in 1727. Painted in the baroque style, it relied on allegory to communicate key issues of early-eighteenth-century British statecraft. The most direct theme expressed in these paintings is the superiority of Protestantism over Catholicism, but other themes, such as the unified rule of Britain's monarchy and recognition of Britain's maritime strength, are also symbolised in the paintings, and were described in a pamphlet authored by Thornhill.<sup>73</sup>

An early drawing of the hall's central ceiling oval, signed and dated by Thornhill in 1706–7, shows that his grand composition celebrated the unification of England and Scotland in the very same year that the Act of Union was passed.<sup>74</sup> This moment was further cemented in Thornhill's painting of Britannia, the earliest known image of her personification in British art, on the Painted Hall's upper south wall. Britannia is shown striding towards William of Orange, welcoming him to Britain as King William III in 1689, alongside her companions, "Reason of State, and Love of her Country".<sup>75</sup> The scene visualises the unity of England, Scotland, and Ireland, into a single territory under the new king's rule. The British state's maritime strength is represented by four paintings on the coving surrounding the central ceiling oval, which show Europe, Asia, Africa, and America personified as women.<sup>76</sup> Thornhill wrote in his pamphlet, and on a fictive tablet above a door on the south side of the hall, that Sir Josiah Child, who died in 1699, was one of the hall's main benefactors.<sup>77</sup> Child was also an important man within the East India Company in the seventeenth century who bridged the Cromwellian period, serving the Company under both Charles I and Charles II. His



*Figure 1.8.* Britannia welcoming William of Orange at Torbay by James Thornhill, 1706/7. South upper wall, Painted Hall, Greenwich. Photograph by the author.

inclusion in Thornhill's list of benefactors, long after his death, suggests it was important to connect the old East India Company of the seventeenth century with the new, state-backed United Company of the early eighteenth century.

After the Act of Union and the merging of the old and new companies, the East India Company's fortunes increased, allowing it to buy properties on Leadenhall Street and Lime Street. The first of these was the purchase of Craven House in 1710.<sup>78</sup> Adjacent properties were then bought for use as warehouses or were rented to their existing occupants. The first of these adjacent purchases, made in June 1712, was two houses and "some tenements" beside Craven House.<sup>79</sup> Minor renovations led to the construction of a new room "over the Transfer Office", measuring twenty-five by ten and a half feet, for the storage of "Indian books".<sup>80</sup> The only object acquired at that time was a large wall clock with an enamelled dial. It was commissioned in 1714 and might be the last extant object to be introduced inside Craven House.<sup>81</sup> It marks a moment in the East India Company's history when its operations increasingly depended on the employment of reliable clerical and secretarial staff in London. Writing and accounting were crucial technologies that underpinned the Company's global trade. The implementation of a controlled system of writing and calculation, performed by a dependable workforce in London, was necessary to control the Company's communications with its factories in Asia.<sup>82</sup> Large clocks like these were important in busy offices, suggesting that Craven House was a bustling workplace filled with staff who were required to be punctual. The clock, measuring 150 centimetres tall and 90 centimetres wide, has a door in front of its pendulum case painted with an East Indiaman ship. There is no record of where it was located inside Craven House, but no doubt, it was positioned to assist staff with timekeeping. It remained an important feature within East India House, and in 1800, was in the Marine Department. In the late nineteenth century, after East India House was demolished, it went into the India Office's Treasury in Whitehall.<sup>83</sup> Clocks like these are often called "Parliament Clocks" because of the tax imposed on them in 1797, under Prime Minister William Pitt. However, this clock was made almost 70 years before the tax existed.

### Jacobsen's East India House

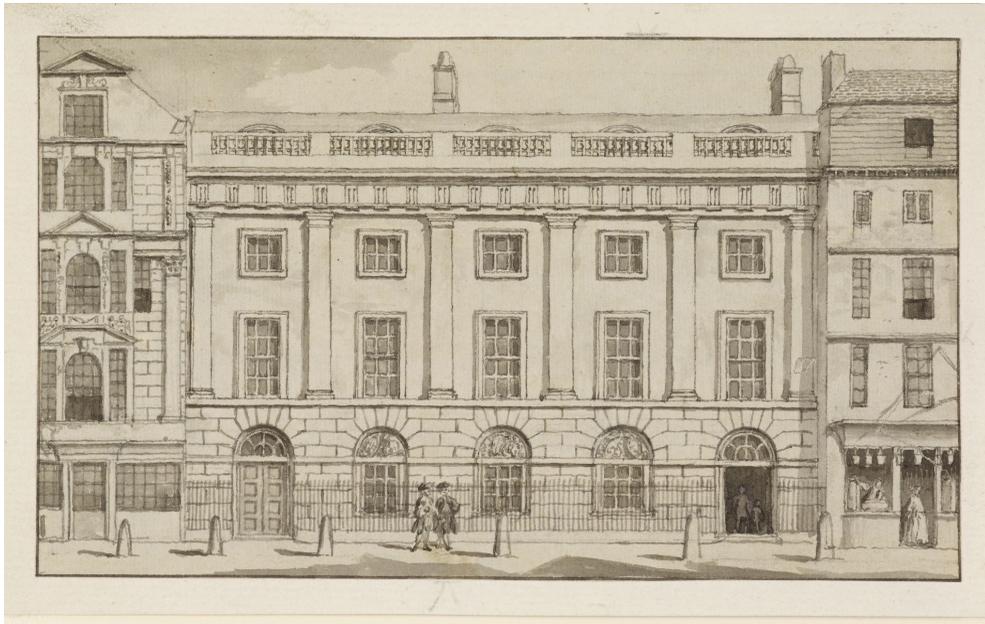
When James Thornhill began working on the Painted Hall at Greenwich, the East India Company was still headquartered in Craven House, the wood-framed structure decorated with paintings of ships that Samuel Pepys described in 1661. By the time the Painted Hall was completed, Craven House was demolished and a new East India House was under construction. The exterior of Craven House had successfully aligned the Company with the monarchy in the 1660s, but the new United Company required a more modern building. Now under state protection, the East India Company commissioned a new headquarters on Leadenhall Street that would exude its heightened status as a national, state-backed enterprise. The properties the Company acquired around Leadenhall Street connected into a sizeable plot for the new building.<sup>84</sup> In December 1725 it temporarily relocated to a building on Fenchurch Street while Craven House was demolished.<sup>85</sup> The architect and merchant, Theodor Jacobsen (d.1772), began constructing the Company's new headquarters in 1726 and by June 1729, the building's exterior was complete.<sup>86</sup> Unlike the fantastic timber-frame ornamentation of



*Figure 1.9.* Wall clock, 1714. British Library, Foster 912. Photograph by the author.

Craven House, Jacobsen's East India House had a sparse, elegant stone exterior. The new building's ornamentation was on the inside, featuring a carefully proportioned Directors' Court Room in "an exact cube of 30 feet ... ornamented by gilding and by large looking-glasses ... [with] windows near the ceiling".<sup>87</sup> One can imagine that, in certain light conditions, the perfectly symmetrical Directors' Court Room, with its gilding, mirrors, and windows, was like an optical illusion that expanded into infinity. Its furniture, fittings, and wall decorations were all commissioned in the 1730s, according to Jacobsen's instructions, literally reflecting the Company's new eighteenth-century image as wealthy, rational, and modern.

The focal point of the Directors' Court Room was a sculpted marble mantelpiece by John Michael Rysbrack (1694–1770), one of the most prestigious sculptors in Britain at that time. It is a rectangular allegorical scene representing Britain's commercial wealth. The seated figure on the left is Britannia, and the three women who approach her on the right represent the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. A camel stands next to the Middle East, a lion accompanies Africa, and India is shown offering a chest overflowing with riches. To the right of the three women is Old Man Thames, resting supinely along the composition's lower edge. Behind him is a dockworker, naked from the waist up, handling a bale of goods. Above the worker there are two ships, connecting the activities on London's docklands with the places where Britain traded, as personified by the three women. Rysbrack was paid £100 for the sculpture on 22 April 1730.<sup>88</sup> It was installed above the fireplace in the new Directors' Court Room, mere



*Figure 1.10.* Façade of Theodor Jacobsen's East India House by Samuel Wale, c.1760s. British Library, WD2056. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.



*Figure 1.11.* The Directors' Court Room of East India House, designed by Theodor Jacobsen. Watercolour by Thomas Hosmer Shepherd, c.1820. British Library, WD2465. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.

weeks before the building was completed, in June 1730, making it the first artwork to be installed inside Jacobsen's East India House.

Rysbrack's chimneypiece was the first marble sculpture to be commissioned by the Company, expressing in stone its connection with the British state inside the most exclusive room of East India House. In a single composition, with Britannia as its focus, the Company's foundation was represented as standing within a new, united, secure Britain. The sources of the Company's wealth were the personified trade nations who supplicated themselves before Britannia. The stevedore on the right represented the Company's labouring workforce in London, who were employed just down the road, in its warehouses and docklands. The Company's purpose, to bring wealth to Britain, was clearly spelled out by this marble composition in the Directors' Court Room.

The inspiration for John Michael Rysbrack's relief of Britannia came from James Thornhill's painted hall in Greenwich. When Rysbrack received the sculpture commission, James Thornhill (1675–1734) had just finished his monumental painting project. It is likely that several figures in Thornhill's Painted Hall were Rysbrack's models. The Painted Hall and East India House held the two earliest representations of Britannia in



*Figure 1.12.* Britannia presented with riches from the East. Marble overmantle by John Michael Rysbrack, 1729–30. British Library, Foster 8. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.

British art.<sup>89</sup> Just like Thornhill, Rysbrack made Britannia into a welcoming, unifying figure who greets the three trade nations. Personifying them all as women is another feature shared between Thornhill's paintings and Rysbrack's sculpted mantelpiece. Thornhill painted the same personified continents, showing Africa with a lion at her side, wearing the skin from an elephant's head, while the Middle East wears a turban and is accompanied by a camel.<sup>90</sup> In the Rysbrack sculpture, the Middle East is also accompanied by a camel, while Africa, with a lion, wears the same headgear from the skin of an elephant's tusked head. Today, Thornhill's work remains the largest allegorical painting scheme in Britain. It was the obvious design source for Rysbrack's marble relief.

In 1730, the same year that Rysbrack's sculpture was installed inside the Directors' Court Room, the Company commissioned George Lambert (1700–65) and Samuel Scott (1701/2–1772) to paint six seascapes of its coastal settlements at Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, Tellicherry, the Cape of Good Hope, and the Island of St Helena. George Lambert painted the coastal landscapes in the background, and Samuel Scott painted the ships in the foreground. Both men had never travelled to any of the places represented in the paintings. The ships would have been relatively simple to paint because the Thames docklands were visited by every type of ship imaginable. George Lambert's contribution, showing the six different settlements as backgrounds, was

more challenging and would have relied on a range of sources, possibly supplied by the Company, of “country house”-style landscapes for him to copy.<sup>91</sup> Lambert might have also relied on written descriptions and interviews with men in London who had travelled to these places aboard the Company’s ships. The seascapes of Bombay, Fort St George Madras, and Fort William Calcutta emphasise the presence of European ships and buildings, relying on skylines of church spires, warehouse buildings and fortifications.<sup>92</sup> The other three seascapes make use of natural features. St Helena’s rocky shoreline, the unmistakable shape of the Cape’s Table Mountain, and the green Malabar Hills behind Tellicherry are these paintings’ key identifiers. Unlike the landscape paintings of India that would follow later in the eighteenth century, Lambert and Scott didn’t add exoticised foreign elements to help identify locations.

The Lambert and Scott seascapes were the first oil paintings to be commissioned by the East India Company in the eighteenth century. Over a hundred years had passed since the Company commissioned Richard Greenbury to paint the Amboyna Massacre and the portrait of Naqd Ali Beg. The seventeenth-century paintings, especially in hindsight, reflected the Company’s chaotic beginnings. By contrast, the Lambert and Scott seascapes from the 1730s give a stable reading of the Company’s business, binding these distant places into the carefully curated, ultra-rational Directors’ Court Room in London. A single cube-shaped room within East India House conjured the Company’s role within Britain whilst visualising the geographical range of its trade. Whilst ironic that the seascapes were not factual, to a London audience they were symbolic through



*Figure 1.13.* Seascape of Bombay by George Lambert and Samuel Scott, c.1731. British Library, Foster 48. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.



*Figure 1.14.* Seascape of Fort St George, Madras by George Lambert and Samuel Scott, c.1731. British Library, Foster 46. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.



*Figure 1.15.* Seascape of Fort William, Calcutta by George Lambert and Samuel Scott, c.1731. British Library, Foster 45. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.



*Figure 1.16.* The Island of St Helena by George Lambert and Samuel Scott, c.1731. British Library, Foster 37. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.



*Figure 1.17.* The Cape of Good Hope by George Lambert and Samuel Scott, c.1731. British Library, Foster 35. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.



*Figure 1.18.* Tellicherry, Kerala by George Lambert and Samuel Scott, c.1731. British Library, Foster 40. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.

their depiction of European ships alongside buildings and fortifications in faraway places. The paintings were commissioned at a time when Parliament was challenging the Company's affairs, which included the Directors' decision to construct forts at its overseas trading posts, so the buildings in the background projected decisiveness and corporate strength.<sup>93</sup> The six seascapes also show changes to the Company's geographical range. None of the paintings are of settlements in the "Spice Islands", nor do they show the factories at Surat and Machilipatnam that had been important in the seventeenth century.

A suite of furniture was also commissioned for the Directors' Court Room, featuring an ornate throne for the East India Company's Chairman.<sup>94</sup> Carved from walnut and upholstered with crimson velvet, this five-foot-tall chair is richly decorated with maritime symbols. The legs taper into the shapes of dolphins, and the top of the backrest is carved into a crowned face of Neptune. There is an embroidered picture of the East India Company's coat of arms on its crimson velvet backrest. The Chairman of the East India Company would have sat upon this throne while presiding over meetings in the Directors' Court Room. Other furniture was made, but this chair was the most emblematic piece of furniture for the new room.

The other significant object inside Theodor Jacobsen's carefully curated Directors' Court Room was the coat of arms of the United East India Company that hung on the



*Figure 1.19.* The East India Company Chairman's Chair, c.1730. British Library, Foster 905. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.



*Figure 1.20.* Coat of Arms of the United East India Company, c.1730. British Library, Foster 887. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.

wall.<sup>95</sup> Its presence drew together the room's symbolically charged décor, as shown in the sculpted mantle of Britannia and the seascapes by Lambert and Scott, presenting the Company as part of the British state. The positioning of all these objects was documented in a small watercolour painting dated 1820, by Thomas Hosmer Shepherd. [Figure 1.11] The Chairman's Chair, the coat of arms, and four of the six seascapes by Lambert and Scott are all visible in the picture, as well as some of the room's large gilt mirrors.<sup>96</sup> It is impossible to say whether the Directors' Court Room in 1820 looked the same as it did in the 1730s, but it certainly contained all the artworks that Theodor Jacobsen placed inside of it. One way to discern how the Directors' Court Room originally looked is to examine another room he designed. Another of Jacobsen's commissions was the court room of the Thomas Coram Foundation at Brunswick Square in London. It was constructed and decorated soon after East India House's completion, as part of London's Foundling Hospital in the 1740s. The Foundling Hospital was demolished in the 1920s, but the Thomas Coram Foundation meticulously preserved its court room by replicating the space inside its new headquarters. It shares many

similarities with the East India Company's Directors' Court Room, such as a marble chimneypiece sculpted by Rysbrack and a matching set of specially commissioned oil paintings that thematically reveal the organisation's idealised function. Both the Directors' Court Room of East India House and the Foundling Hospital's court room were decorated to convey "institutional respectability", aimed at attracting wealthy, virtuous representatives.<sup>97</sup>

The Directors' Court Room of Jacobsen's East India House was not furnished with any of the goods the Company imported. There was a complete absence of wallpaper, porcelain, textiles, lacquer work, or any of the other fashionable goods that it made its money from. Such luxury goods, which were displayed inside wealthy British households, were absent from the very room the Company's directors met. According to Mildred Archer, it was

as if the Directors shrank from appearing even obliquely "Chinese" or "Indian" in their way of life, and, for all the Eastern products incorporated in their office and its furnishings, their dealings might as well have been with North American Indians.<sup>98</sup>

If the directors were interested in the goods the Company imported to London, there was a doorway on the north side of the Directors' Court Room that led into the General Court Room, where its imports were sold by auction.<sup>99</sup> The doorway separated the ordered, rational space of the directors from the clamour and chaos of its mercantile function.

### **John Dean's story: What really happened?**

The final commissioned artworks considered here, from the early 1740s, are a reminder of the chaotic conditions that still prevailed within the East India Company. They are a pair of portraits by Willem Verelst of John Dean, the sole survivor of a shipwrecked East Indiaman named the *Sussex*.<sup>100</sup> They were made at a pivotal point in the Company's history and stand out as completely unique from its other commissions, both before the 1740s, and afterwards. In March 1738, the *Sussex* was shipwrecked off the coast of Madagascar with John Dean on board. It took Dean three years to find his way back to London. The first 16 months of his ordeal were spent walking through Madagascar in search of a place where European ships might drop anchor. An account of his journey, beginning with the *Sussex*'s shipwreck and ending with his rescue from Madagascar,<sup>101</sup> was conveyed to London, transcribed by the East India Company, and published in 1740.<sup>102</sup> With the success of books such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), John Dean's true story became popular. In 1743, the same year that the Verelst portraits were made, the Company awarded Dean a generous pension of 100 pounds a year, and an annuity worth half that amount to his wife, should she outlive him.<sup>103</sup> In 1744 he was appointed an Elder Porter at the East India Company's Drug Warehouse,<sup>104</sup> and in December 1747 he died, probably when he was in his early 40s.<sup>105</sup>

There are three things about the Dean portraits that make them unique. First is the Company's decision to commission Willem Verelst to paint not one, nor two, but three portraits of Dean on 16 June 1743.<sup>106</sup> There were moments in the Company's history when it commissioned two portraits of the same person by the same artist,<sup>107</sup> but never before and never again would the Company commission three identical portraits at once. The next curious thing is that one of the paintings has a detailed inscription along the bottom of the canvas reading, "John Dean, the Only Survivor of the Sixteen Men which remained on board the Ship *Sussex* in the Honble East India Company's Service".<sup>108</sup> No other portraits commissioned by the East India Company bear inscriptions like this, and its presence, written in a font resembling a typeset, suggests that the viewer was invited to connect Dean's image with the published story of his ordeal. The third unique feature is its subject matter. Unlike other East India Company portraits, which show kings, diplomats, politicians, and military heroes, John Dean was a low-ranking sailor.

In Verelst's portraits, John Dean looks healthy and cheerful. He is dressed in new clothes made from coarse grey cloth that befit his status as a financially secure, working-class man. He stands in front of a stone building surrounded by an iron gate resembling the exterior of Theodor Jacobsen's East India House. He holds what looks like a letter of appointment in his right hand, and in his left hand he holds a walking stick and a new hat. If one takes the portraits of John Dean, and the Company's publication about his shipwreck, as honest historical documents, then his story of survival has a happy ending, with him living the remainder of his life in comfort, thanks to his employer's generosity. If one doubts the honesty of these documents, then the portraits show how important it was for the East India Company to control John Dean's story, which represented its version of the circumstances behind the *Sussex's* shipwreck in 1738.

When men such as Dean, with narratives of "trauma, endurance and survival", made it back to Britain, it was normal for them to be "ordered to tell something of their story more widely by authority figures of some kind: employers, law officers, courts martial, churchmen or politicians".<sup>109</sup> The portraits of Dean connected with the published account of the shipwreck, which was used in a court of law by the East India Company to destroy Francis Gostling, the captain of the *Sussex*. Gostling reached London in the summer of 1738, about four months after the shipwreck, and conveyed his version of events to the East India Company's Court of Directors in July and August of that year.<sup>110</sup> According to Gostling, the *Sussex* was irreparably damaged, so when another ship called the *Winchester* came to its aid on 11 March 1738, he gave orders for his crew to abandon the *Sussex*. Gostling also claimed that the *Winchester's* assistance came too late to save the *Sussex's* cargo and the lives of 16 men. The East India Company's directors had no way of disproving Captain Gostling's version of events. On 18 August 1738 the Company's Committee of Shipping reported that the crew of the *Sussex* that had escaped death, along with the crew of the *Winchester*, "had done their duty upon the occasion of quitting the *Sussex* and suffering the *Sussex* to go away from the *Winchester*".<sup>111</sup> At a meeting of the Court of Proprietors, it was resolved, without any objections, that Gostling, along with Captain Dove, the commander of the *Winchester*, should be permanently banned from serving the East India



*John Dean*

The only Survivor, of the Sixteen Men which remained on board the  
Ship Suffex in the Hon.<sup>ble</sup> EAST-INDIA Company's Service

Figure 1.21. Portrait of John Dean by Willem Verelst, 1743. British Library, Foster 19.  
Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.

Company as punishment for not saving the lives of the 16 men who went down with the *Sussex*.<sup>112</sup>

Gostling's punishment would have ended there, had it not been for John Dean's unexpected survival. On 17 September 1740, news reached the Court of Directors in London that "John Deane, one of the crew of the *Sussex*" was alive, and having been transported from Madagascar to Bombay, was awaiting a ship back to London. This news was accompanied by "his narrative and examination dated at Bombay [on] 5<sup>th</sup> December 1739".<sup>113</sup> Two days after Dean's account was read to the Court of Directors, the Company's Committee of Lawsuits recommended that "a Bill be filed at Chancery against the Captain of the *Sussex*".<sup>114</sup> Dean's story gave the East India Company a valuable alternative version to Gostling's account of the shipwreck. A 22-page booklet, written in the third person, was published in 1740, within three months of news of Dean's survival reaching the Court of Directors. By the time Dean finally reached London in September 1741,<sup>115</sup> the booklet, giving the East India Company's account of Dean's story, had received two print runs<sup>116</sup> under the descriptive title:

A True and Genuine Narrative of the whole affair relating to the Ship *Sussex* as sent to the Directors of the Honourable East India Company; From the Time she was deserted by the Officers, and greatest part of the Crew, till she was unfortunately wreck'd on the Bassas De India ... By John Dean, The only surviving person of them all.

The handwritten manuscript that the printed account was based on, also written in the third person, was purportedly the true account of John Dean, and was signed by 13 of the men on board the *Prince William*, the ship that rescued Dean from Madagascar, as witnesses.<sup>117</sup>

The booklet's account of the *Sussex*'s abandonment claimed that Captain Gostling and the others who boarded the *Winchester* pillaged the *Sussex*'s cargo. The 16 men who were left on board determined that the ship was still seaworthy and intended to bring the *Sussex*, with its cargo, to the nearest port for repairs. Dean's account claimed that after plundering the *Sussex*, Gostling gave orders for the ship's lifeboat and fore-sail to be cut free and sent a carpenter to wilfully damage the hull.<sup>118</sup> Gostling's actions in the published account accused him of not just abandoning his ship and stealing its cargo, but also of sabotaging the *Sussex* to ensure that the 16 witnesses of his treachery would die.<sup>119</sup> Armed with John Dean, who was ordered to verify the published account, the East India Company filed a lawsuit against Francis Gostling to gain compensation for the *Sussex*'s lost cargo. At London's Guild Hall on 1 November 1742, John Dean stood as the Company's only material witness to testify against Gostling, who was ordered to compensate the Company £30,202. A second trial was granted at the King's Bench in May 1743, and Gostling was at that time ordered to pay the Company the revised sum of £25,000.<sup>120</sup> Dean's testimony was based on the account that the East India Company had published in 1740, a year before he reached Britain.

After the Company won its case against Gostling in May 1743, Willem Verelst was commissioned to paint the three portraits and Dean was granted his generous pension.<sup>121</sup> The Company's Court Minutes tell us that, on 16 June 1743 it was "Order'd that a Warrant be made out to Mr. William Verelst for Fifty Guineas for painting two

originals and one copy of John Deane late belonging to the Ship Sussex and that one of the original pictures be delivered to th ... ”.<sup>122</sup> The passage’s final sentence was never completed, so the recipient of the third portrait is unknown. It has been suggested that one of the paintings was presented to Dean,<sup>123</sup> although it seems doubtful that a working-class man, even after receiving the East India Company’s favour, would live in a home that could accommodate a five-foot-tall portrait. One of the paintings was installed inside East India House,<sup>124</sup> and the other was placed into storage.<sup>125</sup>

Before the Company commissioned Willem Verelst to paint the portrait, a mezzotint of John Dean, based on an earlier painting by Verelst, had been circulated. This earlier portrait was probably a private business venture in response to the popularity of Dean’s published story from 1740. The mezzotint was widely distributed, and while numerous examples of it have survived, the painting it was based on is now missing. It theatrically shows Dean standing bare-chested and holding a spear, dressed in the ragged remains of his trousers. Behind him there is a ship crashing into a wild shoreline. This image most likely prompted the East India Company to commission the same artist to produce the three portraits of the fully clothed, respectable John Dean. The published story in 1740 and the mezzotint showing a semi-naked man had made Dean famous and informed the directors’ opportunistic decision to commission the portraits, recasting him as a loyal East India Company servant in London. One of the 1743 portraits by Verelst bears the same inscription along the bottom of the canvas that appears on the mezzotint, making the connection between the portraits of clothed and shipwrecked Dean undeniable. Perhaps the Company wanted the portrait of the respectably attired Dean to be made into a mezzotint as well.

The East India Company used John Dean’s story to ruin Francis Gostling and to promote its image as a benevolent employer of workers in its docklands and warehouses. The Company forced through its version of events to enhance its public image and to extract the disgraced captain’s fortune. All of this happened a decade after the East India Company had commissioned a new suite of artworks for East India House’s Directors’ Court Room. The veneer of respectability conveyed in the 1730s commissions, followed by the portraits of Dean, suggests that treachery and manipulation were still at the Company’s foundation. The directors, ensconced in their genteel surroundings, were capable of abject manipulation and cruelty.

The East India Company’s early artworks show the dark, fickle side of its history. The narratives they expose were scripted to help create and control official accounts of events. The Company also used art to declare shifting support for new causes. When England’s monarchy was restored in 1660, the Company proclaimed its loyalty to Charles II through art. Likewise, when Theodor Jacobsen’s East India House was constructed, the Directors’ Court Room was decorated to project it as a rational, unified, financially stable institution in the City of London that rivalled the size and strength of its competitors.<sup>126</sup> By the late 1740s the Company had established a private army that would change South Asia’s political landscape.

Most research on the East India Company’s artworks present the décor of Theodor Jacobsen’s Directors’ Court Room as a starting point. However, these items, commissioned in the early 1730s, can also be seen as the culmination of events that started over a century earlier, all of which predated the Company’s imperial ambitions. The earliest extant painting that the Company commissioned, the portrait of Naqd Ali



Figure 1.22. Mezzotint of John Dean on a rocky shoreline by Johan Faber, after Willem Verelst, c.1743. British Library, P553. Reproduced by permission of the British Library Board.

Beg, was displayed inside three other buildings before it was placed inside Jacobsen's East India House. Its survival into the eighteenth century was possible because the East India Company always had somewhere to keep it. Its continuous habitation of places of business in the City of London from the early seventeenth century onwards made the Company unique. The construction of East India House on Leadenhall Street facilitated the continued growth of a remarkable corporately gathered art collection into the mid-nineteenth century.

## Notes

- 1 Crosby House is today at Cheyne Walk, Chelsea and is a private residence.
- 2 John A. Harris, *A Complete Collection of Voyages and Travels: Consisting of Above Six Hundred of the Most Authentic Writers* (London: T. Woodward, 1744), vol 1, section XXXIII, 874.
- 3 Harris, *A Complete Collection of Voyages*, Vol 1, XXXIII, 875–6.
- 4 Margaret Makepeace *The East India Company's London Workers: Management of the Warehouse Labourers, 1800–1858* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010), 2.
- 5 Jennifer Scarce, "Safavid Dress and Europe", in *The Fascination of Persia*, ed. Axel Langer (Zurich: Verlag, Scheiddeger & Spiess, 2013), 58–77.
- 6 Anthony Farrington, *Trading Places: The East India Company and Asia 1600–1834* (London: British Library, 2002), 48.
- 7 David Veevers, *The Origins of the British Empire in Asia, 1600–1750* (Cambridge: UP, 2020), 38–39.
- 8 Rupali Mishra, *A Business of State: Commerce, Politics and the Birth of the East India Company* (Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 2018), 20–21.
- 9 Mishra, *A Business of State*, 19.
- 10 Thomas Smythe was also a member of the Levant and Muscovy Companies. Portraits of him and 13 members of his family by Cornelius Kettel, painted in around 1600, are in Skinners Hall, London. They are the earliest known portraits of a non-nobility family in Britain.
- 11 Mortimer Epstein, *The Early History of the Levant Company* (London: Routledge, 1908), 103.
- 12 Epstein, *The Early History*, 103–104, note 19.
- 13 Veevers, *The Origins*, 42.
- 14 Farrington, *Trading Places*, 51.
- 15 Courts of Committees Minutes, September 1623 and 20 October 1623, BL, IOR/B/8, 137,199.
- 16 Court of Committees Minutes, 7 January 1624. BL, IOR/B/8, 343–344.
- 17 East India Company, *A True Relation of the Unjust, Cruell and Barbarous Proceedings against the English at Amboyna* (London: Nathaniel Newberry, 1624), frontispiece (BL, T39928).
- 18 Court of Committees Minutes, 20 August 1624. BL, IOR/B/9, 80.
- 19 Court of Committees Minutes on 5 May, 31 May and 22 July 1624. BL, IOR/B/8, 510, 542; IOR/B/9, 30–33.
- 20 BL, IOR/B/9, ff.149, 177, 178.
- 21 East India Company, *The English at Amboyna*. Republished in Harris, *A Complete Collection of Voyages*, 1744, vol 1, XXXIII, 878–81.
- 22 East India Company, *The English at Amboyna*, frontispiece.
- 23 Alison Games, *Inventing the English Massacre* (Oxford: UP, 2020), 107–108.
- 24 Courts of Committees Minutes, 10 December 1624. BL, IOR/B/9, 251.
- 25 Courts of Committees Minutes, 16 February and 18 February 1625. BL, IOR/B/9, 345–346.
- 26 Games, *Inventing the Massacre*, 108.
- 27 William Foster, *John Company* (London: John Bodley, 1926), 44–45.

- 28 Courts of Committees Minutes, 28 February 1625. BL, IOR/B/9, 359; Letter from William Foster to Mr. Woolaston, 7 November, 1903. BL, IOR/L/R/6/248, file 1532.
- 29 Guido Rebecchini, “Charles I’s Visit to Madrid”, in *Charles I: King and Collector* (London: Royal Academy, 2018), 50.
- 30 Courts of Committees Minutes, 18 April 1625. BL, IOR/B/9, 418.
- 31 Courts of Committees Minutes, 6 May 1625. BL, IOR/B/10, 26.
- 32 Courts of Committees Minutes, 28 April 1626. BL, IOR/B/10, f.388.
- 33 Courts of Committees Minutes, February 1626. BL, IOR/B/10, f.261 and 262.
- 34 BL, Foster 23.
- 35 Axel Langer, *The Fascination of Persia* (Zurich: Verlag Scheiddeger & Spiess, 2013), 26–29.
- 36 Courts of Committees Minutes, 13 August 162. BL, IOR/B/9, 70.
- 37 For two entries on Shirley and Amboyna on the same page, see Courts of Committees Minutes, 10 January 1625 and 20 March 1625. BL, IOR/B/9, 295–296 and 381.
- 38 William Foster’s notes, 7 November 1903. BL, IOR/L/R/6/248, file 1532/1903.
- 39 Dennis Wright, *The Persians amongst the English: Episodes in Anglo-Persian History* (London: Tauris, 1985), 5–7.
- 40 Courts of Committees Minutes, 28 February 1627, BL, IOR/B/11; William Foster’s notes, 7 November 1903, BL, IOR/L/R/6/248, file 1532/1903.
- 41 Thomas Herbert, *A Relation of Some Yeares Travaile, Begunne Anno 1626* (London: Stansby and Bloome, 1634), 27–8.
- 42 Herbert, *Some Yeares Travaile*, 28.
- 43 Anonymous, “Account of the Origin of the East India Company”, *European Magazine*, April 1803, 246–248.
- 44 Mildred Archer, *The India Office Collection of Painting and Sculpture* (London: British Library, 1986), 8.
- 45 Paulina Banas, “Persian Art and The Crafting of Polish Identity”, in *The Fascination of Persia*, ed. Axel Langer (Zurich: Verlag, Scheiddeger & Spiess, 2013), 123.
- 46 Banas, “Persian Art”, 128–30, 132.
- 47 Courts of Committees Minutes, 29 January 1619. BL, IOR/B/6.
- 48 Quoted from Archer, *The India Office Collection*, 9; Courts of Committees Minutes, 1630. BL, IOR/B/14.
- 49 Archer, *The India Office Collection*, 8–9.
- 50 Archer, *The India Office Collection*, p.8.
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- 53 Banas, “Persian Art”, 122–123.
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- 55 Court Minutes, 14 September 1642, BL, IOR/B/20, 202.
- 56 Court Minutes, 24 May 1644, BL, IOR/B/21, 168.
- 57 Veevers, *The Origins*, 51.
- 58 Richard Hudson, 27 September 1639. BL, APAC, IOR/G/40/9. Quoted from Veevers, *The Origins*, 51.
- 59 Foster, *The East India House*, 17–18.
- 60 George Birdwood, *Relics of the Honourable East India Company* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1909), 55–56.
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- 62 William Pettigrew and Edmond Smith, “Corporate Management, Labour Relations and Community Building at the East India Company’s Blackwall Dockyard, 1600–1657”. *Journal of Social History* 53, no.1 (2019): 133–156.

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- 66 Ogilby, *The Entertainment*, 103.
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- 72 Veevers, *The Origins*, 172–173.
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- 76 Thornhill’s studies for the coving paintings, dated 1717 – BM 1865.0610.1348.
- 77 Thornhill, *An Explanation*, 3.
- 78 Foster, *The East India House*, 48.
- 79 Court Minutes, 20 June 1712. BL, IOR/B/52, 71.
- 80 Court Minutes, 27 November 1713. BL, IOR/B/52, 549.
- 81 BL, Foster 912. For its commissioning, see Minutes of the Court of Directors, 10 August 1714. BL, IOR/B/53, 104 and Birdwood, *Relics*, 57.
- 82 Miles Ogborn, *Indian Ink* (Chicago: University Press, 2007), chapter 3.
- 83 Foster, *The East India House*, 53.
- 84 Foster, *The East India House*, 48–50.
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- 87 Platt, “The East India House”, 61.
- 88 Foster, *The East India House*, 135.
- 89 David Bindman, “Introduction to the History of British Art 1600 to 1800”, in *The History of British Art, volume 2. 1600–1870*, ed. David Bindman (London: Tate, 2008). Bindman overlooks Thornhill’s figure and identifies Rysbrack’s sculpture as the first image of Britannia.
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- 92 John E. Crowley, *Imperial Landscapes: Britain’s Global Visual Culture 1745–1820* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2011), 171.
- 93 Emily Mann, “Building”, in *The Corporation as a Protagonist in Global History, c.1550–1750*, ed. William Pettigrew and David Veevers (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 219–220.
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- 95 BL, Foster 887.
- 96 BL, WD2465
- 97 Allen, “The East India Company’s Settlement Pictures”, 10.

- 98 Mildred Archer, “The East India Company and British Art”, *Apollo Magazine* 82 (November 1965), 401.
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- 100 BL, Foster 19 and 19a.
- 101 John Dean and The East India Company, *A True and Genuine Narrative of the Whole Affair Relating to the Ship Sussex as Sent to the Directors of the Honourable East India Company ... By John Dean, The Only Surviving Person of Them All* (London: C. Corbett, 1740). The manuscript account of Dean’s journey, told in the third person, is in the British Library, Mss Eur B2.
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- 103 Court Minutes, 16 November 1743. BL, IOR/B/67, 449.
- 104 Court Minutes, Friday 15 March, 1744. BL, IOR/B/68, 243.
- 105 Dean’s year of birth is given as 1716 in S.L. Middleton, *John Dean: Only Survivor of the Ship Sussex* (Great Britain: FeedaRead.com Publishing, 2013), 13.
- 106 Court Minutes, 16 June 1743. BL, IOR/B/67, 333. One portrait is missing and the other two are in the British Library, Foster 19 and 19a.
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- 109 Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World 1600–1850* (London: Random House, 2003), 75.
- 110 Court Minutes, 18 August 1738. BL, IOR/B/65, 107.
- 111 Court Minutes, 18 August 1738. BL, IOR/B/65, 107.
- 112 Court Minutes, 30 March 1739. BL, IOR/B/65, 311.
- 113 Court Minutes, 17 September 1740. BL, IOR/B/66, 84.
- 114 Court Minutes, 19 September 1740. BL, IOR/B/66, 151.
- 115 His first appearance before the Court of Directors was on 2 September 1741. BL, IOR/B/66, f.366.
- 116 Two separate publishers in London published Dean’s account in 1740. One was T. Cooper, and the other was C. Corbett.
- 117 BL, Mss Eur B2, 34–35.
- 118 In the manuscript, the lifeboat is called a “pinnacle”. BL, Mss Eur B2, 3–7.
- 119 Foster “Wreck of the Sussex”, 278.
- 120 Anon, “History of John Dean”, *The Gentleman’s Magazine* (July 1807), 606.
- 121 Court Minutes, November 1743. BL, IOR/B/67, 333, 449.
- 122 Court Minutes, 16 June 1743. BL, IOR/B/67, 333.
- 123 William Foster, *John Company* (London: John Lane, 1926), 208.
- 124 BL, Foster 19a
- 125 In 1807 one of Verelst’s Dean portraits was “lying dormant after 18 years”. Anon, “History of John Dean”, 606. Foster, *John Company*, 208.
- 126 Nick Robins, *The Corporation that Changed the World: How the East India Company Shaped the Modern Multinational* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 55.